

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL AND HIS NEW TRANSLATION

The correlation between Bible translation and biblical restoration has not been appreciated fully by Churches of Christ and Christian Churches in the twentieth century. In this respect, modern advocates of “the restoration of New Testament Christianity” neglect an important principle championed by Alexander Campbell and his contemporaries—the principle of providing the common man with a Bible in his own language. In short, Campbell championed a new translation of the New Testament as a means to effect the grand goal of restoration. This paper seeks to develop this aspect of Campbell’s work with the hope that renewed zeal for accurate and readable English translations in the twentieth century might lead to a greater zeal for “restoring the ancient order.”

For Alexander Campbell the restoration of the ancient order of Christianity necessitated an accurate translation of the Bible. In a series of four articles entitled “History of the English Bible” that appeared in the 1825 *Christian Baptist* (and simultaneous with the first four articles in a series called “A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things”), Campbell wrote, “It is a remarkable coincidence in the history of all the noted reformers from Popery, that they all gave a translation of the Scriptures in the vernacular tongue of the people whom they labored to reform.”¹ Campbell frequently called to the attention of his readers the truth that “all the

¹Citing John Wickliffe as “the *first man* that translated the New Testament into the English language,” Campbell noted the charge of heresy against him: “That the New Testament is a perfect rule of life and manners, and *ought to be read by the people.*” “History of the English Bible, No. I,” *Christian Baptist* II, no. 7 (February 7, 1825) [Vol. 2:142]. Volume and page numbers in brackets are from reprint by the Gospel Advocate (Nashville, TN: 1955, 1956).

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reformers were favorable to a more general reading of the Holy Scriptures, and expressed ardent desires for improved version of them.”² “With every reformation of religion there has been a new translation of the Scriptures,” he affirmed.³ The religious reformation of the nineteenth century brought about by Alexander Campbell and others would be no different.

Some twenty years later, in an address to the Bible Union Convention (held in Memphis, Tennessee), Campbell submitted the following resolution:

That it is a paramount duty of the Christian Church of the nineteenth century, to give to the present age, in our own vernacular, a perspicuous, exact, and faithful version of the Living Oracles of God, as we find them in the Hebrew and Greek originals of inspired Prophets, Apostles, and Evangelists.⁴

Campbell gave three grand purposes for a perfect English Bible: “first, for the union of true Christians; second, for the conversion of the world; third, for the perfection of the church.”⁵

Reviewing obstacles to a new translation, Moses Lard, editor of a restoration quarterly in Georgetown, Kentucky in the 1860s, later observed, “Sectarianism and a perfect translation occupy opposite and hostile positions to one another. . . . Sectarianism always will, with the

²“Historical Sketch of the Origin and Progress of the New Translation,” *Millennial Harbinger* III, no. 6 (June 1832) [Vol. 3:268]. Volume and page numbers in brackets are from reprint by College Press (Joplin, MO: n.d.).

³“New Version and Dr. Cleland, No. I,” *Millennial Harbinger* IV, no. 8 (August 1833) [Vol. 4:402].

⁴“An Address to the Bible Union Convention, held in Memphis, Tenn., April 2, 1852,” *Millennial Harbinger* [Fourth Series] II, no. 4 (April 1852) [Vol. 23:182].

⁵*Ibid.* [Vol. 23:209].

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frightful energy of a dying struggle, oppose a perfect translation.”⁶ For Lard, an accurate translation of the scriptures would weaken “the power of sectarianism” over common believers. An almost identical statement came from the pen of Jacob Creath, Jr., a restoration pamphleteer and advocate of Bible revision from Missouri. He wrote, “The Bible, plainly translated, speaks a very different language from sectarianism. A plain Bible will teach the people the errors of the sects.”⁷ Realizing this need, friends of restoration zealously pushed for revision of the common version (i.e., King James Version).

In 1818, a New Testament was published in London bearing the title: *The New Testament, translated from the original Greek, etc. (The Gospels by G. Campbell . . . the Acts and Revelation by P. Doddridge . . . The Epistles by J. Macknight)*. When Alexander Campbell received a prospectus for publication of an American edition by a New York bookseller, he immediately ordered one hundred copies to distribute among the congregations he served. Lack of subscribers, however, forced abandonment of the project. Campbell remarked, “Being extremely disappointed in the failure of the New York project, and deeply convinced of the immense importance of such a work, I began to think of undertaking it.”⁸ Not until June of 1826, though, did Campbell issue his own proposals for publication of the Campbell, Macknight, and

⁶R. L. Roberts, “Revision and Restoration (1),” *Firm Foundation* 90 (October 16, 1973): 7, citing *Lard’s Quarterly* II (October 1864): 86.

⁷*Ibid.*, citing *The Evangelist* (Iowa) X (March 1859): 104.

⁸“Historical Sketch of the Origin and Progress of the New Translation,” *Millennial Harbinger* III, no. 6 (June 1832) [3:269].

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Doddridge New Testament. In an article pointing out basic errors of the King James translation (e.g., retention of Latin terminology, sectarian bias, use of ecclesiastical words), Campbell concluded, “To remedy those evils, so long and so justly complained of, we have issued proposals for publishing a new translation of the New Testament, made by Doctors Campbell, Macknight, and Doddridge, decidedly the best that has appeared in our language.”⁹

Till this time, Campbell did not hesitate to use the London edition. In debates with two Presbyterians, John Walker at Mount Pleasant, Ohio (June 1820) and William Maccalla at Washington, Kentucky (October 1823), the proper subjects and mode of baptism were explored. In the former, Campbell often quoted the original Greek and George Campbell’s translation of the gospels. Walker at one point reminded the audience, “I was telling you, my friends, that Mr. C. was going to give you ‘a bundle’ of Greek, and you see I was not mistaken. He has read you a ‘bundle’ of Campbell.”¹⁰ Maccalla raised a similar objection when confronting the learned reformer, “Mr. Campbell has eulogized Campbell and Macknight as translators, more than once to-day. Because, I presume, they favour him, in his fanciful interpretation of scripture, more than the common translation of the scriptures.”¹¹ Another indication of Campbell’s use of the London version is the title page of the first issue of *The Christian Baptist* (August 1823) that quoted Matthew 23:8-10 from George Campbell’s *Four Gospels*. The preface to the first issue also

⁹“History of the English Bible, No. IV,” *Christian Baptist* II, no. 11 (June 6, 1825) [Vol. 2:227].

¹⁰Roberts, “Revision and Restoration (1),” 7, citing *Campbell-Walker Debate*.

¹¹*Campbell-Maccalla Debate* (London, UK: Simpkin and Marshall, 1842), 87.

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quoted New Testament passages from the London version. Campbell seemingly launched his first paper with revision of the London New Testament in mind.

Campbell strongly viewed translation as a necessary vehicle for reformation. In an article titled “King James’ Instructions,” Campbell chided the policy of James to retain “consecrated ecclesiastical words.” He wrote:

In no place of the Bible, that I remember, does God say that there are certain *old*, *consecrated*, and *ecclesiastical* words, which must not be translated into the English language. The translators themselves only thought that these words were *consecrated* and *ecclesiastical*, when they occurred in certain places, and when used to express the mode of Christian baptism.¹²

Showing preference for the work of Tyndale (who “changed *charity* into *love*; *church* into *congregation*; *priest* into *senior*; *grace* into *favor*; *confession* into *knowledge*; *penance* into *repentance*; and *a contrite heart* into *a troubled heart*”¹³), Campbell summarized:

The Bible is not yet free from these juggling terms, when words are left untranslated and another meaning is affixed to them than what they originally signify, and that meaning sanctioned by very extensive practice. A sacred regard to the authority of God ought to lead us to reject an error, however old or however generally practiced.¹⁴

Campbell’s goal to produce a Bible that translated “these juggling terms” was realized in the spring of 1826. On April 19 the new version was off the press. The title page read:

The Sacred Writings of the Apostles and Evangelists of Jesus Christ,
commonly styled the New Testament, translated from the original Greek by

¹²“King James’ Instructions,” *Christian Baptist* II, no. 4 (November 1, 1824) [Vol. 2:79].

¹³Ibid. [Vol. 2:80].

¹⁴Ibid. [Vol. 2:80].

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George Campbell, James Macknight, and Philip Doddridge, *Doctors of the Church of Scotland*, with prefaces to the historical and epistolary books, with an appendix containing critical notes and various translations of difficult passages, by Alexander Campbell, Buffalo, Brooke Co., Va.: Alexander Campbell, 1826.¹⁵

Campbell exhibited no qualms about praising his accomplishment. He noted, “We have no hesitation in saying, that, in the present improved state of the English language, the ideas communicated by the Apostles and Evangelists of Jesus Christ, are incomparably better expressed in this, than in any volume ever presented in our mother tongue.”¹⁶ Rather than an indication of blind egotism, this statement likely reflected Campbell’s desire to stimulate the restoration of ancient Christianity by providing the masses with the most reliable and readable Bible possible. In the preface, “An Apology for a New Translation,” Campbell wrote:

A regard for the oracles of God, and a strong desire for the unadulterated milk of the word, will triumph over the declensions and fall of every species of intolerance and bigotry. . . . If the mere publication of a version of the inspired writings requires the publisher to have no sectarian object in view, we are happy in being able to appeal to our whole course of public addresses, and to all that we have written on religious subjects, to show that we have no such object in view. The whole scope, design, and drift of our labor is, to see Christians intelligent, united, and happy.¹⁷

¹⁵Cecil K. Thomas, *Alexander Campbell and His New Version* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1958), 209.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 20, citing *The Sacred Writings*, etc. (1826), appendix, 1.

¹⁷*The Sacred Writings, etc.*, 6th ed. (1839; repr., Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1974), vii.-x. Compare the following from George Campbell’s preface: “Nothing will be found to have conduced more to subvert the dominion of the metaphysical theology of the schoolmen, with all its interminable questions, cobweb distinctions, and wars of words, than the critical study of the sacred scriptures, to which the modern translations have not a little contributed.”

Campbell anticipated severe attacks on his new translation. He realized that “some are so wedded to the common version, that the very defects in it have become sacred.”¹⁸ He observed:

The cavils of the traditionalized and interested, and the objections of the *mere* sectarian leaders, are what we must expect; for they always opposed every improvement. Their fathers opposed the Bishops’ Bible–King James’ Bible. Their grand-fathers opposed Luther’s Bible; and their great-grand-fathers burned the bones of Wickliffe after he was dead, because he attempted a new version and recommended it to the English people.¹⁹

Charges of “making a new Bible” and “altering and amending the very word of God” necessarily would come. Opponents seemed eager to express their disapproval, but Alexander was just as eager to defend his work. He challenged, “I am glad to have it investigated with all scrutiny and severity, because I am of the opinion I can defend the work in every grand point against any opposition from any quarter whatever.”²⁰

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹“Historical Sketch of the Origin and Progress of the New Testament,” *Millennial Harbinger* III, no. 6 (June 1832) [Vol. 3:272].

²⁰“A Refutation of the Foregoing Misrepresentations,” *Christian Baptist* IV, no. 4 (November 6, 1826) [Vol 4:87]. Compare a later statement from Campbell: “Opposition to the New Version we anticipated from all that class who love kings and regal bishops, parish churches, large salaries, sprinklings and lustrations—from Calvinists, Arminians, Unitarians, Trinitarians, Socinians, and all who have inherited their consciences and their creeds from a devout sectarian ancestry. We counted the cost, and are prepared from the reckoning.” “New Version Defended—No. 5,” *Millennial Harbinger* V, no. 4 (April 1834) [Vol. 5:150].

Campbell was given many opportunities to defend his new translation. “A Friend to Truth” accused the new translation of deviating from that of Campbell-Macknight-Doddridge.²¹ “On the single subject of *baptism*, the alterations are *upwards of eighty*.”²² Campbell replied, “This ‘*Friend to Truth*’ tells eighty lies in telling one truth!”²³ Campbell had done only what George Campbell suggested be done, translate instead of adopt or anglicize the Greek in order to produce a *pure* English New Testament (and both the prospectus and appendix adequately defined this procedure). This “Friend to Truth” also insinuated that Campbell leaned toward Unitarianism, because Acts 20:28 read “church of the Lord” instead of “church of God.”²⁴ Campbell replied that he did not favor this variant as a result of any theological bias; rather, he followed the authority of Johann Griesbach, the German New Testament textual critic, who preferred this reading. Later, “Vindex” took up the cause of “A Friend” by showing that the phrase “the church of the Lord” was unparalleled in scripture.²⁵ In reply, Campbell used “Vindex’s” own argument against him by indicating several phrases that occur but *once* in

²¹See the objections in “New Version Defended, and O. Jennings, D. D., Exposed—No. III,” *Millennial Harbinger* III, no. 11 (November 1832) [Vol. 3:535] and “New Version and Dr. Cleland, No. I,” *Millennial Harbinger* IV, no. 8 (August 1833) [Vol. 4:403-404].

²²Letter from ‘A Friend to Truth,’ *Christian Baptist* IV, no. 4 (November 6, 1826) [Vol. 4:82].

²³Ibid. [Vol. 4:84].

²⁴George A. Smith made the same charge against Campbell through the pages of the *Episcopal Recorder*; see “New Version Defended—No. 6, *Millennial Harbinger* V, no. 5 (May 1834) [Vol. 5:204-205].

²⁵‘Vindex,’ “The New Translation,” *Christian Baptist* IV, no. 9 (April 2, 1827) [Vol. 4:178-180].

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scripture, among which was “*his blood*” in application to “God.” “Mr. Vindex is confuted by his own argument,” wrote Campbell, “for his reasoning will exclude one part of the disputed text which he wishes to retain in the common version, for the same reasons precisely which he urges against the new.”²⁶ Campbell then related how the selection of “church of the Lord” heightened rather than degraded the glory of Jesus.

A letter written from Kentucky, dated 9 January 1827, recorded an incident of burning the new translation. A short extract reprinted from the *Baptist Recorder* confirmed this report.

I subscribed for Mr. Campbell’s Testament, and received it, paid \$1.75 for it, kept it five or six months and compared it carefully with one I have loved ever since I was 13 years old. On the first reading I condemned it, but let it remain in my house some two or three months; then tried it again, condemned and burnt it.²⁷

This one-man trial was conducted by Edmund Waller, brother of the principle editor of the *Recorder*. Waller had told the writer who reported this incident to the *Christian Baptist* that he had prayed to God *ten* days to know whether or not to burn the testament. After mature reflection he decided to do so. One day, having a good fire and his family being out, “he shook the leaves well and committed it to the flames with a clear conscience.” To all this, Campbell sarcastically replied:

He compared it carefully with the common version!! Yet it is believed he could not tell the nominative case to a verb, nor the antecedent to a relative, to save himself from the Spanish inquisition. But he is regenerated, and prayed “*ten*

²⁶Editor’s reply to ‘Vindex,’ Ibid. [Vol. 4:181].

²⁷Letter from Edmund Waller, under heading “Conflagration of ‘the Sacred Writings of the Evangelists and Apostles of Jesus Christ!’” Ibid. [Vol. 4:184].

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days” for light on this subject!!! His one dollar and seventy-five cents cost him ten days praying!! – Criticism, avault! This defies you!²⁸

Later, in the *Christian Baptist* of July 1828, a writer commented about this conflagration:

The man who could burn the New Testament after a prayer of the enormous length of “*ten days*,” when in so good a frame of mind, certainly wanted nothing but the sanction of the law to burn the editor!! This man’s orthodoxy and his amiable spirit are both from Geneva. His father John pursued the same course – witness poor Servetus!²⁹

In June of 1828, S. G. Marshall noted, “The new translation gives great offense to the clergy.” One Methodist preacher condemned Campbell’s attempt to reform the word “baptize” by giving a new translation.³⁰ In conversation with a Presbyterian on baptism, Marshall “brought forward” the new translation. When the preacher was told it was Campbell’s translation, he exclaimed, “Burn it! burn it! take it away! He is a bad man! I would as soon see the Devil as him! He has been proved a liar in the public papers.”³¹

²⁸Editor’s reply to Edmund Waller, *Ibid.* [Vol. 4:184].

²⁹Extract from a letter not written to the Editor, under heading “New Testament & c.,” *Christian Baptist* V, no. 12 (July 7, 1828) [Vol. 5:291].

³⁰Perhaps no other single change caused greater stir than the replacing of “baptize” with “immerse.” In a reply to Jennings, Campbell observed, “What a heat and effervescence of passion has this question about *water* created! It has kindled fires which all the water in the ocean cannot quench.” “New Version Defended, and O. Jennings, D. D., Exposed—No. III,” *Millennial Harbinger* III, no. 11 (November 1832) [Vol. 3:534]. The chief objection urged by Dr. Cleland against the new translation was the treatment of *baptizo*. “New Version and Dr. Cleland, No. IV, *Millennial Harbinger* IV, no. 11 (November 1833) [Vol. 4:529]. Compare the criticism of G. A. Smith in “New Version Defended—No. 9,” *Millennial Harbinger* V, no. 8 (August 1834) [Vol. 5:350-351].

³¹Letter from S. G. Marshall, *Christian Baptist* V, no. 12 (July 5, 1830) [Vol. 5:260].

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Campbell's work of reform through translation won him the name of "innovator" from a certain Mr. Brantly. Charging that the "innovators" could raise mountains of difficulty by substituting a New Version, Brantly questioned: "Why is it that all innovators become tired of the Old Version and seek new ones? None of the leaders of innovation have remained contented with the old-fashioned Book in its present dress."³² Campbell reminded Brantly that opponents of the Authorized Version voiced exactly the same objections to it.³³ Regardless, many made known their disapproval of Campbell's tampering with their "Old Bible."

A caustic attack came from the pulpit of Reverend George Waller, brother of Edmund Waller. A writer named "Titus" reported excerpts from a sermon by Waller.

*It is presumption, it is wicked, for an individual, and he a mere smatterer, to take the work of a translation out of the hands of king James' translators, men so renowned for their learning and piety, who were so providentially protected, and who lived so much nearer the age of the apostles, that they must, consequently, have been much better acquainted with the original language than any man can be in the present age.*³⁴

This type of reasoning reflected a general criticism of the new version (or of any new translation deviating from one in current and wide use), that it was not the word of God.

³²From *Columbian Star*, "Mr. Brantley's Views of Reformation and of New Versions," *Christian Baptist* VII, no. 12 (July 5, 1830) [Vol. 7:298].

³³In six consecutive numbers of the *Christian Baptist*, Campbell serialized the entire original preface of the King James Bible ("The Translatours to the Reader," VI, nos. 3-8 [Vol. 6:63ff., 90ff., 112ff., 145ff., 159ff., 186ff.]. Campbell probably reprinted this to counteract anticipated protests to the second edition of his New Testament that came off the press early in 1829. For a good treatment of the revisions of *The Sacred Writings*, see Thomas, *Campbell and His New Version*, 44-66.

³⁴Letter from 'Titus,' *Christian Baptist* IV, no. 10 (May 7, 1827) [Vol. 4:196-197].

A reader, dubbed “Candidus,” informed Campbell that “one of our teachers in this country has refused to have the new translation read in a public meeting because it is not the word of God.”³⁵ Campbell sarcastically told “Candidus” that the objector was quite correct.

Now all the versions that were read before this king’s reign, *ceased* to be the word of God when the king signed the decree; and from that moment the king’s version *became* the word of God. There are *two* things necessary to constitute any translation of the word of God: first, that is be *authorized by a king* and his court; and again, that it be furnished by *forty-nine persons*.³⁶

Walter Warder, a Baptist minister from northern Kentucky, thought “Candidus” referred to him and objected in the September issue of the *Baptist*. Warder stated that he had been misunderstood. In a church meeting, the question was raised whether “Pastor” or “Bishop” should be preferred as the more scriptural. When the new translation was introduced, Warder objected, not because it was not the word of God, but “because the church has not received it as the standard by which questions of that nature were determined.”³⁷ All questions were settled by appeal to the common version. Warder continued to say he had used the new version at home and liked it, but he did not use it in the pulpit due to the prejudice, excitement, and inflammation present in the church regarding it. Within the churches bitter objection to the new translation was noticeable. Those leaders endorsing and personally using the testament but not wishing to unsettle the peace of the churches, like Warder, did not use the version publicly.

³⁵Letter from ‘Candidus,’ *Christian Baptist* IV, no. 11 (June 4, 1827) [Vol. 4:236].

³⁶Editor’s reply to ‘Candidus,’ *Ibid.* [Vol. 4:236-237].

³⁷Letter from Walter Warder, *Christian Baptist* V, no. 2 (September 3, 1827) [Vol. 5:44-45].

This unnecessary unsettling of the popular mind gave R. W. Landis grounds for attacking Campbell's rejection of certain passages.³⁸ This especially was the case, since Campbell himself admitted that the alterations contended for did not change one article of Christian faith.³⁹ In response to Dr. Cleland a few years earlier, Campbell even disclaimed responsibility. He wrote:

If I am constrained to expose the numerous blemishes, and to set in order the many mistranslations and *no*-translations found in the version of 1611 – if, in going into these details and expositions, the faith of any should be weakened in a book consecrated to them by the adoption and prescription of their fathers, the blame will be due to those who have imposed this duty upon me.⁴⁰

One major factor that contributed to the disturbance of the common people over the new version was the frequent branding of Campbell as “Unitarian,” “Socinian,” or “Arian.”⁴¹

Campbell was charged with denying the trinity and the deity of Jesus.⁴² The omission or

³⁸Thomas, *Campbell and His New Version*, 73, citing *Biblical Repository* [Second Series] I (1839): 325-326.

³⁹“It is not *the faith*, but *the knowledge* of Christians which we aim to assist in these improvements.” But Campbell was quick to point out that greater knowledge meant *stronger* faith. “Historical Sketch of the Origin and Progress of the New Translation,” *Millennial Harbinger* III, no. 6 (June 1832) [Vol. 3:272].

⁴⁰“New Versions and Dr. Cleland, No. I,” *Millennial Harbinger* IV, no. 8 (August 1833) [Vol. 4:403].

⁴¹In the October 2, 1826 *Christian Baptist* (“The New Testament,” IV, no. 3 [Vol. 4:67]), Campbell corrected a slanderous report that rumored George Campbell was a Socinian.

⁴²These charges evidently arose out of Campbell's refusal to accept creeds as authoritative and his demand to “call Bible things by Bible names.”

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alteration of traditional texts⁴³ used in support of these fundamental doctrines only heightened the growing resentment against him.

Official censures were inevitable. Two worthy of note came from Baptist churches in the Elkhorn Baptist Association of Lexington, Kentucky. An extract of a letter from North Elkhorn Church to the Association appeared in the *Christian Baptist* of November 1828. The intent of the letter seemed to be excommunication of those who espoused doctrines contrary to traditional teachings of the accepted creed. It stated:

In as *much* as this association agreed to maintain the doctrine of grace as contained in the Bible, and set forth in the Philadelphia confession of faith, should not this association protest against *Armenianism*, and *Cammelism and his new book* – as *Cammel* is against creeds and confessions, how can his sentiments be tolerated amongst us.⁴⁴

Another letter from Mount Pleasant Church reflected protests against Matthew 28:19 of the new translation that read “immersing them into the name . . .” This letter affirmed:

We as a church hold a particular atonement, and a special application of the same by the Holy Ghost in regeneration – we as a church profess not to understand what is meant by immersing into the name of the trinity, instead of baptizing by the authority or in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.⁴⁵

⁴³In response to G. A. Smith, the following texts were discussed in three articles: Matthew 28:19; Hebrews 9:14; Acts 20:28; Philippians 2:6-7; 1 Timothy 3:16; Titus 2:13; and 1 John 5:7. “New Version Defended—Nos. 5, 6, & 7,” *Millennial Harbinger* V, nos. 4, 5, & 6 (April, May, & June 1834) [Vol. 5:150-155, 204-208, 274-277].

⁴⁴Letter from ‘W. C. T.,’ under heading “The Spirit of the Year of Grace, 1828 . . .,” *Christian Baptist* VI, no. 4 (November 3, 1828) [Vol. 6:89].

⁴⁵*Ibid.* [Vol. 6:89].

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In wake of the Beaver Anathema, a statement of dissociation from Campbell and his teachings by Baptist churches in western Pennsylvania,⁴⁶ followed “The Appomattox Decrees.” The Appomattox Association, in an attempt to stymie the rapid spread of “heresy” among the Regular Baptists in northern Virginia, issued the following statements:

1. Resolved, That it be recommended to all the churches composing this Association, to discountenance the writings of Alexander Campbell.
2. Resolved, That it be recommended to all the churches in this Association, not to countenance the new translation of the New Testament.⁴⁷

Campbell strongly castigated this “ecclesiastical council” for their failure to give him a fair hearing, and he charged the members of the association guilty of partial judgment. He replied:

If my opponents can only get the people to read their calumnies, slanders, and misrepresentations, and will neither publish my defences in their papers, nor permit the people to read mine – the victory is theirs.

. . . The Beaver and Appomattox Associations have condemned upon rumor, and have never permitted, summoned, nor invited the accused to defend themselves. What do the members of Appomattox know of the new version of the New Testament, and how many of them know any thing about my sentiments or writings from my own lips or pen? *Not one in ten who vote upon such matters.* To them it is all rumor. They are complete fools in the hands of a few designing men.⁴⁸

One Baptist preacher who did receive a fair hearing and an opportunity for defense against criticism of his use of the new Bible was “Raccoon” John Smith. Smith often had been

⁴⁶See “The Beaver Anathema,” *Christian Baptist* VII, no. 8 (March 1, 1830) [Vol. 7:198-203].

⁴⁷“The Appomattox Decrees; or, the Use of Ecclesiastical Councils Exhibited,” *Millennial Harbinger* I, no. 6 (June 1830) [Vol. 1:261].

⁴⁸*Ibid.* [Vol. 1:261-262].

puzzled and even embarrassed by “the recurrence of obsolete terms and antiquated forms of speech” in the King James Bible. When he sat down to peruse the first edition of the new translation in 1826, “many an obscure passage was at once made clear, unintelligible words and phrases disappeared, discrepancies were reconciled, and the sacred page seemed to grow transparent.”⁴⁹ Smith immediately began using the new version in his preaching. This practice elicited censure from one of the churches at the Kentucky Baptists’ North District Association annual meeting in July 1827. Two of the complaints were:

1. That, while it is the custom of Baptists to use as the Word of God King James’s translation, he had, on two or three occasions in public, and often privately in his family, read from Alexander Campbell’s translation.

2. That, while it is the custom in the ceremony of baptism to take the candidate into the water, and solemnly pronounce the words, “I baptize you, my brother, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the *Holy Ghost*,” he, on the contrary, is in the habit of saying, “*By the authority of Jesus Christ, I immerse you into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*”⁵⁰

One indignant person exclaimed, “There is no *Ghost* in it at all.” Other churches made similar charges, to which Smith replied, “I plead guilty to them all.” Intense and disorderly discussion followed with little accomplished. The following Monday the complaints were heard once again.⁵¹ “One after another of his opponents arose and boldly asserted that the New Translation was not the Word of God.” The moderator “closed the argument against the

⁴⁹John Augustus Williams, *Life of Elder John Smith* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company, 1904), 139.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 146.

⁵¹Unless otherwise noted, the quotations in the remaining section on Smith are all from Williams, *Life of Elder John Smith*, 150-152.

translation by saying that he had never seen the book, and never wished to see it.” He added, “Elder Waller did right when he burnt it to ashes.” In defense, Smith challenged a statement of one elder who lauded the King James translation as “the *only* word of God.” Smith reasoned:

Then is it not a pity that the apostles left the world and the Church without any Word of God for fifteen hundred years? for, as these intelligent citizens around me know, they wrote in Greek, without the least knowledge of the language into which King James, fifteen hundred years afterward, had their writings translated! But, if nothing is the Word of God but the King’s Version, do you not, brethren, pity the Dutch, who have not that version, and who could not read one word of it, if they had it?

These remarks swayed the people in Smith’s favor and evoked uncontrollable anger from some of his opponents. One man howled, “Brother Moderator, I can not stand it! I would rather die than be run over in this way by a Campbellite!” The man then, in the words of Stone’s biographer—Williams—“shook his orthodox fist in the Campbellite’s face.” To this passionate outburst, Smith replied, “If this is the fruit of that Spirit whose influence in conversion I am charged with denying, then do I plead guilty to that charge. Whether such a spirit as this is from God or not, I leave you all to judge.” After this, the Association delayed the matter until the following year. The Smith incident, however, indicated the growing use of the new translation among Baptist preachers and the corresponding denunciation of it.⁵²

⁵²See too Alonzo Willard Fortune, *The Disciples in Kentucky* (Lexington, KY: Convention of the Christian Churches in Kentucky, 1932), 82-83, for similar charges against Smith from the Mount Zion Church of the Green River Association.

Like Smith, many warmly received the work of Campbell. One contributor, "Paulinus," praised the new translation⁵³ as "well calculated to aid the liberal-minded reader in his study of the sacred volume" and very helpful in understanding "some passages which, in the common translation, appear difficult, if not unintelligible."⁵⁴ "A Friend to the Restoration" gave his own response plus that of others. He said, "With regard to the new translation, I am highly pleased with it; and the more I read it the better I like it. It does not, however, escape the censures of the priests who would make the people believe, if they could, that the old version fell down from heaven."⁵⁵ One writer noted that the new Bible was the "means of converting a *confirmed Deist* into a believer in Christ."⁵⁶ A reader from Louisiana remarked, "Your paper and the new translation have created great excitement here."⁵⁷ In a letter dated 5 November 1829 from Londonderry in Northern Ireland, "W. T." wrote, "I am well pleased with your New Testament, and generally with your Preface and Appendix. Truly, you are an honor to the country which gave you birth."⁵⁸

⁵³Note that the present designation *Living Oracles* was not appropriated until the appearance of the fourth edition in 1835. "Notice," *Millennial Harbinger* VI, no. 3 (March 1835) [Vol. 6:144].

⁵⁴Letter from 'Paulinus,' *Christian Baptist* IV, no. 7 (February 5, 1827) [Vol. 4:140].

⁵⁵Letter from 'A Friend to the Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things,' *Christian Baptist* IV, no. 12 (July 2, 1827) [Vol. 4:251].

⁵⁶"Second Edition of the New Testament," *Christian Baptist* V, no. 9 (April 7, 1828) [Vol. 5:225].

⁵⁷Letter from 'J. W.,' *Christian Baptist* VI, no. 3 (October 6, 1828) [Vol. 6:60].

⁵⁸Letter from 'W. T.,' *Christian Baptist* VII, no. 6 (January 4, 1830) [Vol. 7:152].

Not all clergy opposed use of the new translation. Some even preached material “borrowed” from it. “Theophilus” told brother Campbell, “I have very recently heard a clergyman, of the Presbyterian stamp, deliver a discourse from a part of Paul’s Epistle to the Hebrews, and he as certainly made his sermon out of the preface to this epistle in the New Translation.”⁵⁹ A letter from Virginia told of one young man who professed having skeptical and infidel sentiments removed through the influence of Campbell’s writings especially “the new translation of the Testament.”⁶⁰ One writer commended Campbell on his consistent use of “immerse,” but he regretted the fact that some Baptists adopted Campbell’s views on certain subjects, palmed them upon the community as their very own, and then joined with the Paedobaptists in abusing the author.⁶¹ George W. Smith, a restoration preacher in West Tennessee, described the effects of the new version on his mother. He stated, “She lived to near the age of 80 years, and spent much of her time after she united with the reformation, in reading the Bible, mostly in your Family Testament. She would often say, ‘It seems like a new book. Things that used to appear dark are all now as clear as day.’”⁶²

A statement from one of Campbell’s critics provided an indication of widespread use of the new translation among the reformers. He lamented, “I have always seen this version used by

⁵⁹Letter from ‘Theophilus,’ *Christian Baptist* VII, no. 8 (March 1, 1830) [Vol. 7:195].

⁶⁰*Christian Baptist* VII, no. 11 (June 7, 1830) [Vol. 7:270].

⁶¹“Diffusion of Truth,” *Millennial Harbinger* VII, no. 7 (July 1836) [Vol. 7:317].

⁶²Letter from George W. Smith, dated December 14, 1847, under “Obituary,” *Millennial Harbinger* [Series Three] V, no. 2 (February 1848) [Vol. 19:119].

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Campbellite preachers, when preaching from the New Testament. Was it too much, therefore, for me to conclude that the translation from which they quote, and from which they preach, was the one most approved by them.”⁶³ In 1842 Campbell estimated that approximately 40,000 copies of the new version had been distributed.⁶⁴ By 1852 the reformer could reflect that in just twenty-five years his improved version went through six editions and was read in Asia, Africa, Europe, and America. He exclaimed, “This is the Lord’s doing, and wondrous in our eyes!”⁶⁵ The work of Campbell, the growing recognition of the inadequacy of the common version, and interest in Bible societies reawakened the consciousness of the general populace for a corrected Bible. Upon the appearance of a new Baptist translation, Campbell pleasantly remarked:

Of course I cannot but feel gratified that one of my great sins in attempting to circulate a new and true version of certain controverted points, is now becoming the great sin of a respectable portion of the Baptist community; and consequently my heterodoxy will fast pass away as the Baptists succeed in prepossessing the community in favor of a new, correct, and more intelligible version of the good book.⁶⁶

⁶³Thomas, *Campbell and His New Version*, 69, citing *Biblical Repository* [Second Series] 4 (1840): 213.

⁶⁴“The Bible Society and the Reformation,” *Millennial Harbinger* [New Series] VI, no. 11 (November 1842) [Vol. 13:521].

⁶⁵“An Address to the Bible Union Convention, held at Memphis, Tenn., April 2, 1852,” *Millennial Harbinger* [Fourth Series] II, no. 4 (April 1852) [Vol. 23:191].

⁶⁶“A Baptist New Version,” *Millennial Harbinger* [New Series] VI, no. 7 (July 1842) [Vol. 13:315].

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ADDENDUM

The following are excerpts from personal letters sent by Alexander Campbell to P. S. Fall of Louisville, Kentucky that mention Campbell's revised New Testament. These were transcribed by and are courtesy of R. L. Roberts of Abilene Christian University. See also the article by Roberts, "Alexander Campbell and His New Version: Thoughts From His Letters" in *Mission Journal* (January 1982).

April 30, 1825

"You promised me something for the Baptist, will it soon arrive? How do you get along? What are the Baptists doing in your vicinity. I sent you a prospectus for the New Testament sometime since, and will if necessary send you one or two more for distribution. This work I conceive to be the most worthy of patronage of any ever presented to the American public—but the clergy I anticipate will oppose it.

". . . I feel much interested in the proposed translation, for from the means possessed I doubt not but it can be rendered exceedingly important and vastly superior to any copy of the New Testament which has appeared in our language. I am always making preparation for it, and I believe a great deal can be done to render it much plainer and more intelligible by presenting it on paper in the ancient form in which it was exhibited by the Apostles. Even our Common version could be presented on paper a hundred per cent more intelligible than it now appears. Some time will, notwithstanding, be required for bringing it into general acceptance. Nothing

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but the fear of breaking ground has prevented the leading sectaries who have both learning and influence to introduce an improved version. But I argue that every thing that will be beneficial to mankind must begin some time and some where. And I may, as I believe my duty requires, make the attempt. The scriptures some way or other are very little understood. Most of the teachers are grossly ignorant of them. The New Testament, like the founder of the Christian faith, appears to be in the world unknown, and unappreciated. And, indeed, on the popular plan it never can be understood. I verily believe in my heart, that professed Christians are about as ignorant of the meaning of the little book as they could possibly be to have it so common and to talk of it so often. I know some women that could teach all the members of the general assembly shortly to meet in Philadelphia the meaning of the little book—and yet they are but plain scholars.”

June 18, 1825

“I acknowledge with much gratification the receipt of your very interesting letter of the 18th ult enclosing to me 20 dollars on account of Debates and C. Baptist. The flattering success of your great exertions to have the New Translation of the Christian Revelation accomplished inspires me with fresh ardor in this important undertaking. I begin to hope that I may see it at no distant day, in the hands of many Christians profiting and proppelled thereby. I am not yet able to form any correct idea of the size of the edition but rather think it must be a small one say 1500 copies. There will be much opposition to it in many places. For the same policy that once stole the bible from the people yet exists, though dressed in another garb, and will prevent them from understanding it.”

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September 10, 1825

“In a day or two I start for the Dover Association down in Virginia by special invitation of the baptists there—and will make a 6 weeks tour if the Lord permit in the Old Virginia. When I return I intend to put the New Testament to press, and shall attempt a small edition. You have excelled all others from whom I have heard in your success in getting subscribers.”

January 14, 1826

“I am still nervous and often complaining but the Lord has still been gracious and merciful in affording me so much thought and health as I enjoy. I never was more busily employed nor more laborious in study than this winter. I am obliged to be so because of the responsibility of the work I have undertaken.

“In getting a new font of type of a large and elegant type in Philadelphia for the New Testament, they made a mistake in sending some letters deficient and others superfluous, so that when all things else were ready and we opened the type we found our disappointment which has thrown us back full six weeks in the prep work we have got on the way completely now—and this day commence the “Testimony of John the Apostle.” The Testimony of Matthew Mark & Luke are completed. The materials and workmanship are 1st rate. I have got every thing of the 1st quality and have spared no expense in making the impression elegant; and the work will be as I think, of rare importance. The labor of reading proofs, of comparing different versions with which I am well supplied is most arduous—but I am paid as I progress. I proposed this work too

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low to the public, through an anxiety to get it introduced. I am printing but a small edition, and the few unsubscribed for copies will be sold at 2.00 or 2.25.

“If there is any taste for reading and understanding the Oracles of God in this generation I am greatly deceived if this work will not be a real acquisition.

“It will be later in getting out of the press than I contemplated on account of the above disappointment, and because I can not hurry a work of this kind. It must be done well and it is almost impossible to be both correctly and rapidly done.”

March 3, 1826

“. . . My health though delicate has been mercifully sustained through the most arduous winters study I have ever spent.

“The present numbers of CB will inform you how we get on with N-T- It will not be out of press till sometime in April and consequently can not be sent to Kentucky till end of May or June. And whether I can accompany it or not is entirely uncertain. But if the Lord will I will be in Kentucky some time during the ensuing season—and hope to have the pleasure of seeing you once more in the flesh. But of the time I will advise you as soon as it is known to myself. We have paid our compliments to Dr Blackburn in the first no- &-

“I have written

one General preface to the whole New Testament

one to the four gospels

one to the Epistles in General

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one to the Romans in particular

one to the Acts of Apostles—

engrossing in all 30 octavo pages small type containing the matt of 60 octavo pages in the size of the body of the work. The appendix will be probably larger. I do think these prefaces will give a different turn to the course of reading now in use, and exhibit the New Testament as another sort of book than generally made by systems.

“But perhaps I am too sanguine—And maybe I may have to say what one of the Reformers said who thought he could convince all men of the truth of the Reformation principle—

‘Alas! Old Adam is too strong for young Melancthon’--

“I have however done the best my circumstances would allow. I would much rather have made a new translation out and out as to do what I have done.”